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SUBJECT: NATO SYG'S INITIAL VISIT TO TURKEY

Classified By: DCM Doug Silliman, Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

¶1. (C) Summary: During his initial trip to Turkey as the new NATO SYG, Anders Fogh Rasmussen urged senior GoT officials to provide significant additional training support in Afghanistan and received strong push back when he pressed Turkey to show more flexibility to help improve NATO-EU cooperation. GoT interlocutors, particularly FM Davutoglu, stressed that while they have shown flexibility on NATO-EU cooperation, the EU has yet to meet Turkey's expectations regarding closer links with ESDP, particularly participation in the European Defense Agency. Erdogan reminded Rasmussen in their one-on-one meeting of the commitments made to Turkey prior to his appointment as NATO SYG. In support of Rasmussen's expressed interest in improving relations between NATO and the Muslim world, FM Davutoglu offered to host a meeting among member states of NATO, NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue and the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative, with participation by the Secretaries General of the OIC and the Arab League. At an iftar dinner hosted by PM Erdogan in Rasmussen's honor, the SYG highlighted his respect for the Muslim faith. Although MFA officials questioned the wisdom of Rasmussen linking challenges in Turkey-Greece bilateral relations with difficulties in NATO-EU cooperation in a public manner prior to the visit, they considered the visit a success. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) During his August 27-28 initial visit to Turkey as NATO SecGen, Anders Fogh Rasmussen met with President Abdullah Gul, PM Recep Tayyip Erdogan, FM Ahmet Davutoglu, Defense Minister Vecdi Gonul and Chief of the Turkish General Staff (TGS) Ilker Basbug. Rasmussen also attended an iftar dinner hosted in his honor by PM Erdogan and laid a wreath at the tomb of Ataturk, the Republic of Turkey's founder. MFA Deputy Undersecretary Cevikoz and NATO Policy Department Head Gulhan Ulutekin provided us an initial readout of Rasmussen's visit on August 31.

Afghanistan A Key Priority

¶3. (C) According to Ulutekin, Rasmussen welcomed Turkey's contributions in Afghanistan in all his meetings and pressed Turkey to provide additional significant contributions in support of NATO training efforts for the Afghan National Security Forces. Turkish officials highlighted for Rasmussen Turkey's deep commitment to Afghanistan, as reflected by its robust contributions in both military and reconstruction efforts since the launch of NATO's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) operation in Afghanistan. Without making any specific commitments, FM Davutoglu said in his joint press briefing with Rasmussen that "Turkey will continue to take part in NATO activities at the highest

level," and agreed with Rasmussen,s point about the need for a stronger Afghan army since "NATO,s mission will conclude when they (Afghans) are capable of keeping their own security."

As is NATO-EU Cooperation

¶4. (C) Rasmussen asked for greater flexibility from Turkey so that NATO-EU relations can be better developed, particularly in his meetings with President Gul (who was Turkey,s foreign minister when NATO and the EU concluded the Agreed Framework for cooperation) and FM Davutoglu. Noting that both NATO and the EU have operations in Afghanistan, Kosovo and off the coast of Somalia, Rasmussen argued that the inability for the two organizations to formally work together is placing the lives of trainers at unnecessary risks, especially in Afghanistan.

¶5. (C) In response, FM Davutoglu said Turkey has shown flexibility in NATO-EU cooperation, allowing for the two organizations to work out on-the-ground arrangements, but cautioned that Turkey believes in pragmatism without diluting basic principles. He said that the existing framework for cooperation (referring to the Agreed Framework for NATO-EU Cooperation that was concluded in 2003) should be respected and complained about the EU,s failure to keep promises made to Turkey. In particular, Davutoglu forcefully told Rasmussen, "It is not understandable why Turkey has not yet become a member of the European Defense Agency despite its contributions." According to MFA Deputy U/S Cevikoz,

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Davutoglu urged Rasmussen to "focus on being NATO,s Secretary General, not Europe,s."

¶6. (C) While providing his readout of the Rasmussen visit, Cevikoz complained to DCM about Rasmussen s statement in his blog, which was posted prior to his visit. The statement pointed to problems in bilateral Turkey-Greece relations as a reason for difficulties in NATO-EU cooperation. Cevikoz said Rasmussen had apparently arrived with pre-conceived notions that the difficulties in NATO-EU relations stemmed from bilateral problems between Greece and Turkey and sought to address them on that basis. However, Cevikoz noted that Rasmussen appeared very receptive to FM Davutoglu,s explanation of Turkey,s position and said there is a greater degree of confidence that Rasmussen understood Turkey,s position on NATO-EU relations following this meeting.

NATO Engagement with Muslim World

¶7. (C) At the August 27 iftar dinner hosted by Prime Minister Erdogan in his honor, Rasmussen somewhat self-consciously underscored his respect for the Muslim faith and highlighted NATO,s dialogue with the Muslim world as his "high priority." Erdogan highlighted Rasmussen,s participation at the iftar as a meaningful message to the Muslim world but, in an apparent indirect criticism of Rasmussen,s handling of the cartoon crisis in 2005, he also railed against the practice of labeling extremist violence as "Islamist terrorism." Erdogan stated that "Drawing on isolated incidents to portray a whole religion and all its followers as potential terrorist, trying to disseminate such perceptions and tolerating such attitudes is, to say the least, a crime against humanity."

¶8. (C) In support of Rasmussen's expressed interest to improve relations between NATO and the Muslim world, MFA,s Cevikoz said FM Davutoglu offered to host a meeting among officials from countries who are members of NATO, NATO,s Mediterranean Dialogue (Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Algeria, Mauritania, Tunisia and also Israel) and the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (Kuwait, Oman, Qatar and UAE), as well as the Secretaries General for the Organization of the

Islamic Conference (OIC) and the Arab League. Cevikoz envisioned the meeting to be held at the foreign ministers level and said Turkey intends to turn this idea into a more formal proposal to be floated at NATO. He opined that should Turkey host such a meeting at the foreign minister level, Allies should be eager to attend. Rasmussen was noncommittal, saying only that the idea is a possibility and that he will look into this further. Ulutekin said Turkey recognizes that such an event would need the support of all Allies, and would not take any action without their support. She dismissed press reporting of Turkey,s offer to host a NATO-OIC summit, noting that it would be politically difficult for NATO to meet with the OIC (which includes Iran among its members).

Erdogan Reminds Rasmussen about Commitments

¶9. (C) In their one-on-one meeting, PM Erdogan reviewed the six items Rasmussen had agreed to pursue prior to his selection as NATO SYG, according to Cevikoz. Although the MFA did not have a readout of the conversation beyond this, Ulutekin said GoT officials were aware of Rasmussen,s statement noting that he intends to stand by his commitments but also needed the support of all Allies to deliver on the commitments.

Strategic Concept Review

¶10. (C) Rasmussen expressed appreciation for former Turkish NATO PermRep Umit Pamir,s participation in the "group of wise men" tasked to provide him with recommendations for a revised NATO Strategic Concept. Ulutekin said Turkish officials stressed the importance Turkey attached to NATO remaining the pre-eminent transatlantic defense organization and that the consensus rule must remain the bedrock of NATO decision making.

Comment

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¶11. (C) Although Rasmussen made the right points, he did not clearly win over his Turkish hosts. Turkey is still looking to Rasmussen to fulfill some of the promises made ahead of his selection as NATO SecGen, in spirit as well as letter. Nonetheless, the GoT appreciated Rasmussen,s decision to visit Turkey as one of his first stops as NATO SecGen and will support Rasmussen,s efforts, particularly in NATO,s engagement with the Muslim world, which Turkey views as an important ingredient in the Alliance,s success in Afghanistan. On NATO-EU relations, Rasmussen,s public comments before his visit had set him up for a tough response. Turkey is again pointing to its participation in the European Defense Agency as a key first step before it is willing to take further measures to improve cooperation.

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